

WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Rep. Harry Mitchell today said the new report by the President's Commission on Care for America's Returning Wounded Warriors illustrates that Congress and the Administration must continue to pursue an overhaul of veterans' care.

Mitchell is the chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations and the primary sponsor of the [Dignity for Wounded Warriors Act of 2007](#).

The commission, co-chaired by former Senator Bob Dole and former Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala, "issued six broad recommendations intended to transform a troubled system for military health care and veterans' assistance that has left some injured soldiers languishing for years and resulted in inequitable and inconsistent disability benefits."

[Source: [President's Commission on Care for America's Returning Wounded Warriors Web site](#) ; [Washington Post](#) , July 26, 2007]

Mitchell made the following statement:

"The Dole-Shalala Commission report further illustrates that we need a overhaul of veterans' care and that we must continue to build on the progress we have made in recent months.

"The new Congress has reversed the dangerous cuts to veterans' health care and benefits by the previous Congress, but we now need help from the White House.

"The [Wounded Warriors Assistance Act](#) , which has been passed unanimously by the House and Senate, now sits on the President's desk. I urge him to sign this legislation.

"But our work cannot and must not end there. In May, the House passed the [Mitchell-Space-Walz-Rodriguez Amendment](#) ^A

, which will help returning service members transfer their Department of Defense-held medical records to the Department of Veterans' Affairs. I urge the Senate to put our veterans first and also adopt this amendment."

The Mitchell-Space-Walz-Rodriguez Amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act, which helps returning service members transfer their Defense Department medical records to the VA, gained unanimous House approval in May.

Mitchell along with fellow subcommittee members Reps. Zack Space of Ohio, Tim Walz of Minnesota and Ciro Rodriguez of Texas, offered the amendment after the subcommittee discovered that VA doctors continue to lack full access to their patients' medical information, including the medical treatment patients received and medical conditions they may have had before they were discharged from the military.

In March, Mitchell and the House voted unanimously to pass the Wounded Warriors Assistance Act, which establishes new guidelines to help wounded servicemembers returning from combat get the care they need.

Mitchell and U.S. Rep. Rahm Emanuel of Illinois were the first to introduce House legislation in the wake of the reports of problems at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center. Mitchell introduced the Dignity for Wounded Warriors Act of 2007 after The Washington Post exposed numerous problems at Walter Reed, including moldy walls and rodent droppings in the rooms of recovering troops, and the difficulties soldiers and their families had navigating through the government bureaucracy.

Many of the provisions included in the original Dignity for Wounded Warriors Act were included in the final Wounded Warriors Assistance Act, including

- Establishing a maximum acceptable ration between medical case managers and servicemembers receiving outpatient care,
- Establishing guidelines for Department of Defense-wide training for case managers,
- Establishing guidelines for communication between case managers, servicemembers and their families,
- Requiring annual reports from installation commanders on the status of military medical facilities and relations support facilities and report the results to the Congress,
- Establishing a Defense Department hotline for outpatients to report support facility deficiencies,
- Establishing a requirement to assign servicemember advocates to assist troops with financial, administrative, transitional and other problems.